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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY SERVICES

IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Submitted to

Governor Stan Stephens

by the

Human Services Subcabinet

August 28, 1990

PLEASE RETURN

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY SERVICES

I. MISSION

The Department of Family Services was envisioned as a comprehensive umbrella agency for all child and family services including child abuse and neglect investigations; family based services; foster care, group home, and residential placement services; youth probation; and institutional services. In addition, the agency was to provide case management services to developmentally disabled children and adults; handle foster home, group home and day care licensing; and provide mental health services to children and families and community services to the elderly. The longer term vision for DFS included eventually adding community and institutional services for the developmentally disabled. For a variety of reasons, this broad vision was never achieved, and no clear mission for the department was established.

The human services subcabinet believes that, over the long run, developing a comprehensive children and family services agency is laudable. This agency's mission would be to provide all services necessary to protect children, strengthen the family unit, and ensure opportunity for the maximum growth and development of each child. To accomplish this mission, the agency would be designated as the lead state agency responsible for coordination of all social services provided to children and youth except services to the developmentally disabled.

However, it is clear at this juncture that a single agency of this scope is still some years off. First, DFS must be successful at its current responsibilities. These responsibilities are: 1) quality child protection services including investigations, family based services, foster care, and residential, psychiatric and other treatment options for abused and neglected children; and 2) quality juvenile corrections services.

Given this mission, some DFS activities could be relinquished to other departments: day care and group home licensing to the Department of Health and Environmental Sciences, developmental disabilities case management to SRS, and adult protection to the Governor's Office on Aging.

After the Department of Family Services has demonstrated that it is providing necessary protective and youth correction services outlined in the mission statement, the administration will consider how to organize a comprehensive system for Montana's children. This system would include services to youth who have not traditionally been the responsibility of

the department, including those youth with long term and serious emotional and mental disturbances. The subcabinet hopes that such a review can be accomplished before the 1993 legislature.

II. ESTABLISHING A STRONG MANAGEMENT FOUNDATION

The human services subcabinet believes that establishing a firm management foundation from which to administer DFS should be the first priority of this plan. The subcabinet recommends that a permanent director be appointed who has strong children services knowledge; that a deputy be hired to aggressively implement needed changes in organization, policy and programs; and that a program administrator for direct services be hired who is knowledgeable about provision of services to children and families.

The subcabinet recommends that the new DFS leadership be charged with developing policies and procedures for handling child protection case work and ensuring that implementation of policy is consistent throughout Montana. First priorities should include staff training and evaluation, establishing a quality control program to ensure uniform policy implementation, and case reviews by regional staff.

III. REGIONS

The original purpose of the regional structure for DFS was to reduce the number of supervisory personnel, provide more effective decision making, and create a direct link with local planning entities. While the number of supervisory personnel was reduced and there is local planning, the department has failed to provide a consistent system of youth services with uniform policies and administrative practices. In addition, the department has lost the flexibility to move funds from one region to another because of decentralized budget policies.

The human services subcabinet recommends that DFS management realign the duties of regional administrators. The primary responsibility of regional staff should be to ensure the uniform implementation of policy, provide a link with community planning groups, supervise key staff, coordinate training, and evaluate field casework. Current regional fiscal staff would be transferred to Helena in order to improve fiscal oversight and accountability and to provide centralized administration of programs. Remaining regional staff should be co-located with county DFS offices.

The human services subcabinet agrees that regional child and family councils play an important role in the development of family based and community based programs. This role will become even more important as pilots for family and community

based services are developed in accordance with recommendations in Section VII. The focus of the councils should be on improving interagency coordination and identifying service delivery gaps.

The human services subcabinet recommends that youth placement decisions be made by the department after consulting with appropriate individuals and agencies.

The department should place priority on returning children to their communities from out-of-state placements, psychiatric care and residential treatment. The focus should be on the individual child and his or her family. The department should seek out the input of other resources such as mental health, juvenile probation and public school staff in designing services to meet specific needs of children and families. Priority should be placed on keeping the child in the home and community. Placement, especially out-of-state placements, should be a last resort.

IV. LOCAL COMMUNITY CHANGES

The human services subcabinet recommends that a lead worker be appointed in every county to ensure that county commissioners, legislators, and members of the general public have a contact for DFS services.

V. STAFF

The Department of Family Services must determine the correct number and distribution of social workers to meet its responsibility by establishing uniform policies on when cases should be opened and closed. Once these policies are in place, the department leadership will be able to better determine the need for additional social workers.

VI. EQUIPMENT

It is imperative that state employees be provided basic equipment and supplies. The Governor's Office of Budget and Program Planning has recommended that $45,000 of FY91 operations funds be released from reversion to begin the process of providing appropriate equipment. The OBPP also has recommended an additional $40,000 for operations in the budget for the next biennium.

VII. NEW PROGRAMS

In light of Montana's severe budgetary problems, the department must look at creative ways of redirecting current funding. This could include reducing the current over

reliance on psychiatric and residential care and redirecting funds into less restrictive and less expensive family and community based services.

In order to redirect these funds, the subcabinet makes three recommendations:

a) General fund monies currently in the SRS budget for psychiatric and residential treatment services should be transferred to DFS in the next budget cycle. This is consistent with a recommendation advanced by the legislative fiscal analyst. This transfer would provide DFS with funds for alternative services and the incentive to develop such services. A single budget for these funds would allow DFS to determine the best placement and to use available funds in the most effective way.

At the present time DFS and SRS are working on a cooperative agreement to facilitate this transfer. The Department of Family Services will immediately assume responsibility for transition of these programs and negotiations with the providers of psychiatric hospital and residential treatment services.

b) Money will be allocated in the next biennium to develop family based and community based programs. It is not possible to reduce psychiatric hospital and residential treatment expenditures without developing alternative services. The human services subcabinet believes strongly that preventative family based and community based services to children will save money and families. Specifically the subcabinet recommends that DFS begin immediately to plan for both family based and community based services to be developed in each region.

c) Specific targets which can be monitored should be established for return of Montana children from out-of-state programs. The subcabinet already has started this process. SRS and DFS have jointly funded staff review of the placement of all Montana children currently in out-of-state placement. Plans are already under way to begin returning these children.

d) DFS should be responsible for the approval of <u>all</u> psychiatric hospital and residential placement. Since DFS will be responsible for the general fund expenditures in these areas, it should develop rules to ensure that children receive care in the least restrictive and most appropriate setting and that families retain appropriate financial responsibility for their children.

VIII. COUNTY/DFS ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

The issue of county responsibility for department admini-

strative costs has never been effectively addressed. The subcabinet recommends that the Governor appoint a task force of county welfare directors, county commissioners, and DFS and SRS staff to develop cost-effective options for solving this problem.

IX. JUVENILE CORRECTIONS

Immediate problems of inappropriate youth placed at Pine Hills have been addressed temporarily. The human service subcabinet believes that a longer term solution, including the development of alternatives to correctional facilities and the appropriate relationship of DFS with juvenile probation, should be considered. In order to do this, the new DFS management should provide adequate support for the correctional function of the department and plan for the inclusion of the juvenile corrections system in the overall mission.

X. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

DFS lacks an effective management information system. The data base for some of its critical processing is still linked to the SRS data base. The human services subcabinet recommends that development of a quality management information system be a long term goal of the DFS management team and that this system be compatible with the SRS TEAMS system.